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<mtncart@sti.net>

03/21/2005 09:41 PM

To: yose\_planning@nps.gov

cc:

Subject: Merced River Plan

RMR-D-79  
pg 1 of 2

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MAR 22 2005

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

Michael J. Tollefson, Superintendent  
Yosemite National Park  
P.O. Box 577  
Yosemite, CA 95389  
Draft Revised Merced River Plan/EIS

March 21, 2005

Dear Superintendent Tollefson,

In a letter (August, 2004) responding to the Scoping of the Revised Merced River Plan/EIS (RMRP), the Board of Directors of the Yosemite Sierra Visitors Bureau (YSVB) advised you (NPS) that the scope of this plan should not be so narrowly defined as to exclude the issues of adequate parking for a growing day use visitor experience, and replacement of low cost, low impact drive-in campgrounds in previously disturbed areas of Yosemite Valley. Many community members echoed those concerns at the recent hearings in Oakhurst and also advised NPS that an inclusive process for developing the plan should be used, involving all affected stakeholder groups. This should include Native Americans, local environmental organizations, campers, rock climbers, and other historic user groups, as well as Yosemite gateway communities. At the public hearings in Oakhurst, we were told that the NPS staff was there to listen to our concerns. It is evident that while the NPS may be listening, they are not hearing.

Aside from the obvious absence of any of the scoping recommendations made by gateway stakeholders, this Draft RMRP is as difficult to comprehend as other documents released for review, and I fear is destined for the courts again. Opposition to some alternative actions, such as Day Use Reservations, quotas and possible entry gate closures brought up at the last Gateway Partners meeting, was dismissed as management actions unlikely to be used. If this is the case, the RMRP should not include them in any of the alternatives. Information conveyed by the NPS can greatly influence public perception, as we have seen, resulting in the belief that Yosemite National Park is not accessible. Therefore, exclusion of items is as important as inclusion.

Resource protection in balance with a positive visitor experience has been, and will continue to be, my primary concern and is foundational to all other plans for Yosemite Valley. Protection of environmental, cultural, historical, and economic resources must be considered for protection, as well as the the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of the Merced River. As Jen Nersesian illustrated in the NPS presentation at the Oakhurst public hearings, protection of resources takes precedent over action plans such as the Yosemite Valley Plan. Yet NPS continues to "un-encumber" development projects related to the Yosemite Valley Plan without completion of the foundational RMRP. While this may showcase the ability of the NPS to manipulate the US judicial system, it demonstrates absolute disregard for concerns of Yosemite's stakeholders. It is regrettable to see the NPS use their expertise and resources against Yosemite's stakeholders.

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pg 2 of 2

instead of directing them toward developing true partnerships for the future.

I feel strongly that the Draft RMRP should be withdrawn from public comment by the NPS to avoid more time-consuming and costly litigation. A cooperative effort, with all stakeholder groups represented in the process, should be used to re-tool this plan to make it more understandable and consistent with the mission of the National Park Service regarding Director's Order 75A on Civic Engagement and Public Involvement.

I want to thank the NPS staff for the efforts they made (including dress code adjustments) in the presentation of this Draft RMRP. I do still strongly recommend that a more inclusive planning process be used. If current laws forbid such efforts, let's work together to change them. Congressman Radanovich's Gateway Cooperation Bill could be such a vehicle. Concepts taught by NPS Planning Personnel at the Yosemite Gateways Planning Conference seem to show a disconnect between NPS practice and NPS theory. Together we can change that.

I am committed to ongoing civic engagement with the NPS to insure that the preservation of Yosemite transcends political agendas, career objectives and special interests, and is truly for future generations. I will also continue to engage our legislative and administrative representatives from federal, state and local governments to insure their support as we work together toward preservation and enjoyment of our National Parks.

Respectfully Submitted,

Oakhurst, CA 93644

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MAR 22 2005

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK



To: <yose\_planning@nps.gov>  
cc:  
Subject: Comment

03/21/2005 09:37 PM  
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Thank you for sending me the Draft Revised Comprehensive Management Plan. I have reviewed it and especially want to comment on the section regarding "Background Sound and Noise Levels," p. III-63. It mentions that "the greatest source of sound was the numerous buses . . . ."

This problem is especially noticeable in the Upper and Lower River Campgrounds, making the camping experience most unnatural. These buses are supposed to eliminate the problems associated with traffic congestion, but their noise makes it seem as if we one is camping in the middle of a city. Please write into your plan that the buses must be quiet, such as those run on natural gas or electricity.

I see, also, that Alternative 2 seems to have the potential of more campsites, and I think this is good. I hope you will always opt for more space for those who want to experience Yosemite's sights and sounds from a tent over those who need a lodge room or cabin.

Thank you for continuing to elicit comments from those who have loved Yosemite since childhood.

Sincerely,

vert

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To: YOSE\_planning@nps.gov  
cc:  
Subject: Draft Revised MRP comments

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pg 1 of 4

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MAR 22 2005

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

21 March 2005

Dear Superintendent Tollefson,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Draft Revised Merced River Plan. Following are my comments, first in summary, and then in detail.

**Summary:** The Merced River, while wild and scenic, is also ecologically stressed. Effectively protecting the Merced under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and the Organic Act is imperative for both the long-term health of the river and visitors' experience of it. The current plan, while extensive, does not offer such protection in any single alternative. Of the alternatives, number three outlines the best protection, but still needs increased specificity and strengthening of protective measures, including: 1.) setting a lower cap on visitation; 2.) choosing a more accurate baseline for quantifying river health; 3.) improving the VERP program; 4.) using segment quotas and limiting employee housing; 5.) committing firmly to reverse river degradation; and 6.) choosing a ¼-mile river buffer in El Portal.

Because of its high profile and popularity, Yosemite could be a national model for addressing issues related to high visitor use.

**Comments:** The Merced River is an integral part of Yosemite, a place that awakened my love of nature and has guided the course of my life. A year ago, I moved with my family from a comfortable suburban existence in San Jose to volunteer in Yosemite. Last March, traveling up the Merced River canyon while the redbuds were blooming dazzled me. The journey reminded me of my first camping trip in Yosemite when I was 16, which eventually led to my working for the park today. As I write these comments, I can hear the springtime roar of the Merced as it churns down from the high country, laced in whitewater.

As striking as it is, the Merced River is a very stressed environment. Non-native fish prey on native creatures. Riverside buildings disrupt water flow. Trampling erodes the Merced's banks and irrevocably alters adjacent meadows. Millions of us draw close to the Merced in our enthusiasm for its beauty. With our sheer numbers and widespread lack of knowledge about how to care for the river, we unknowingly destroy some of the beauty we seek.

Protecting the Merced while allowing human use calls for a wise, but potentially difficult, decision. Such a decision would embrace legal requirements and take a long view of preservation. To do this, Yosemite needs to address what both the Ninth Circuit Court ruling and the river point to: the Merced corridor cannot sustain its current level of use, much less a higher one, without further damaging the river environment, perhaps irreparably. Even now, river degradation -- including bank erosion, ever-deepening social trails in adjacent meadows, and traffic and people

jams -- is evident.

In refining the Revised Merced River Plan, the park has a great opportunity to protect the river that helped create Yosemite Valley. At the same time, NPS can enhance visitors' experience by ensuring that they see, touch, and hear a truly wild and scenic river, not a damaged one.

Following are the ways I see as most important to protect the Merced and visitors' experience of it:

**1. Set a visitation cap for the river corridor at 4 million or below.**

At Yosemite's current annual visitation rate of 3.5 to 4 million, the Merced's banks are worn bare at the most popular beaches and meadows. Many people choose not to enter Yosemite Valley, especially in summer, because of the crowds. Capping visitation is an excellent idea, but the current plan's cap of 5.3 million will mean further degradation of the river and of visitor experience. Lowering the cap will be potentially difficult politically. However, it could be proactively explained as a way to safeguard visitors' experience in Yosemite while protecting the Merced.

- Management actions might include requiring day-use permits for Half Dome and other popular areas along the river. Day-use permits could be explained and interpreted as wilderness permits currently are.

**2. Choose a more accurate baseline for river health.**

The Revised Merced River Plan necessarily chooses a baseline against which to measure changes in river health. But current river condition is not the best baseline, because the river is already ecologically stressed. A better baseline would include restored meadows and riverbanks, plus minimal intrusion by non-native species.

- Will NPS assess proposed actions in the river corridor, such as applying herbicides to control non-native plants and installing a cell tower in El Portal, for their potential impacts on river health and scenic qualities?

**3. Improve the VERP program.**

The VERP concept – quantifying and monitoring environmental health and visitor experience – is a good idea. To measure both factors accurately, VERP should be amended to include more ecological indicators. For example, assessing plant species composition, cover, and reproduction in addition to length of social trails will be a more accurate measure of riverbank condition. Other ecological indicators should be used as well. The “vital signs” indicators being developed by the Inventory & Monitoring program could be used with social indicators to track the Merced's condition.

- Methods of data collection should be clearly described, including time frames for tracking indicators.
- Triggers for management action should be clear to the public and firm.

**4. Use segment quotas and limit employee housing.**

Visitation quotas for river segments, used in combination with the VERP program, would be the best way to protect the Merced and visitors' experience of it. Such quotas, stated and adhered to,

would reduce the likelihood that the river's health will be neglected for political reasons.

- Reducing the number of park and concession employees living in Yosemite Valley would ease stress on the river environment. (A good first step would be to use the General Management Plan maximum of 1,790 for the river corridor.) While living in the Valley can be a life-changing experience, providing too much Valley housing is not consistent with protecting the river.
- Concession employees likely spend more person-hours in the river corridor than any other group, but receive little or no training in park stewardship. NPS and DNC have an excellent opportunity here to develop a park stewardship program for employees to help protect the Merced.

#### **5. Commit firmly to reverse river degradation.**

NPS has the legal backing in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and the Organic Act to protect the river, and it is developing the scientific criteria to recognize river degradation. While the plan's list of potential management actions is good, stating and committing to specific responses to river degradation, rather than giving a list of possible actions, would inspire public confidence in the park's commitment to uphold river health.

#### **6. Choose a ¼-mile river buffer in El Portal.**

Public agencies often lay out a quarter-mile buffer on either side of a Wild and Scenic river. In order to uphold its reputation as an effective land protection agency, NPS should do the same in El Portal.

- If the buffer is sliced thinner in some places, NPS will have no ethical footing from which to lobby other Merced River managers and private landowners to protect the river. It will lose an opportunity to be an exemplary land management agency.
- The Merced River in El Portal clearly is scenic, so this Outstandingly Remarkable Value should be included in planning for the El Portal river segment. The canyon is one of the few remaining wild river corridors in the state, and its spring show of redbuds, poppies and other wildflowers is stunning. Oak trees, which have largely disappeared from their once-wide swath of California, spread across the steep hillsides here. The roaring whitewater and the gorge's green walls are the gateway to Yosemite, and development along the river would impair the majesty of this entrance. NPS has an opportunity in El Portal to take ethical high ground by protecting the scenery and finding a sustainable and unobtrusive way to provide housing and administrative buildings.

Because of its high profile and popularity, Yosemite could become a national model for protecting river resources and visitors' experience. During planning for the park's future, I hope we keep in mind the vision of Yosemite's striking beauty, the environmental threats the Merced now faces, and a commitment to protect this wild and scenic river for future generations.

Sincerely,

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To: yose\_planning@nps.gov  
cc:  
Subject: Draft Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS

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pg 1 of 6

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MAR 22 2005  
YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

P. O. Box 5572  
Fresno, CA 93755

22 March 2005

Superintendent, Yosemite National Park  
Draft Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS  
P.O. Box 577  
Yosemite, CA 95389

Fax: 209/379-1294

This is being emailed to: yose\_planning@nps.gov

Sir:

The following comments are submitted by me personally, and should not be confused with remarks which I will be submitting on behalf of an organization.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Draft Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS. I commend the effort put forward so far by you and your staff and recognize this is a huge undertaking. This is an extremely important planning document, the implementation of which will have long-term impacts on all areas of the Merced River corridor managed by the NPS, but particularly on Yosemite Valley. My comments focus on the user capacity program portions of the DEIS.

General Comment: I found the Draft SEIS to be unwieldy and difficult to understand. It would be good to do a thorough edit on the document to reduce volume, redundancy, internal inconsistencies, and unclear or unnecessary statements (for an example, please see my Comment #4 below). I have heard many people say they cannot comment on Yosemite National Park's planning documents because they are too large and incomprehensible. This is not in the best interest of full disclosure or cooperative planning. Although I am very interested in this issue, I did not have time to read the entire document. I focused on Alternative 2, and did not really have a lot of time to devote to Alternatives 3 and 4.

Comment #1. I think the range of alternatives proposed in the Draft SEIS is not adequate to comply with the intent of NEPA. It appears that three of the four alternatives cannot be implemented as presented.

Alternative 1 (No Action) cannot be adopted due to the findings of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. I do not believe it is feasible to implement either Alternative 3 or Alternative 4 because the NPS does not have the capability to monitor and control visitor use of the river corridor on a segment by segment basis, or on a management zone basis. Thus, Alternative 3 and Alternative 4 are not viable alternatives. In fact, the Draft SEIS itself says monitoring of visitor use of the river corridor on a segment by segment basis, or on a management zone basis is

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pg 2 of 6

infeasible. For Alternative 3, the SEIS (page II-61 para 2) states: "For this reason, it is infeasible to try to manage visitor levels strictly within the river segments separately from the larger developed areas." Regarding Alternative 4, the Draft SEIS (page II-69 para 5) states: "...effective real-time monitoring and management of visitor levels per management zone would be very difficult and would require a substantial investment in infrastructure and personnel." These alternatives are not viable alternatives if they cannot be implemented. I strongly feel the NPS needs to develop a broader range of feasible alternatives for analysis in the SEIS.

Comment #2. The NPS should fully analyze the alternative that was "considered but dismissed from further analysis" that proposed a corridor-wide daily quota with VERP (p. II-74).

It is readily apparent that portions of the Merced River corridor within Yosemite, particularly in Yosemite Valley, are suffering the effects of too much visitor use. One way to stop or reverse these effects is to limit the numbers of people in the corridor on a daily basis through a daily quota, preferably in combination with a day-use reservation system. Clearly, a well-developed and scientifically based VERP program also is needed to ensure the daily quotas are set at a level that will not degrade ORVs. It is not valid simply to state that such an alternative "was not carried forward because there are similar alternatives that achieve the same effect with more environmental benefits." This reader is not convinced.

According to the NPS, the wilderness user capacity program has been extremely well-supported by both park management and wilderness users, and is often held up as an example of science-based and defensible management practices in wilderness management. Why can't the NPS adopt a similar process for other developed areas of the park, including Yosemite Valley?

Comment #3. Page II-35 para 3 states "Current park policies and existing use levels are considered to be protective of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values."

I believe this is a subjective assumption that could lead to irreparable long-term harm to ORVs of the Merced Wild and Scenic River. It is an assumption that should be substantiated (or refuted) with data. For example, how do we know current levels of use of the Merced River corridor with all of the associated accoutrements needed to support those visitors (e.g., utility lines, roads, structures, employee housing, school, day care center, etc.) are not harming aquatic invertebrates, or changing the hydrologic regimes of the Valley? If these ORVs are, in fact, being harmed, perhaps the focus of the NPS should be to reduce visitation, and concurrently reduce the size and scale of the infrastructure needed to support those visitors.

Comment #4. The DEIS is confusing relative to the duration of "interim limits." The quotes below illustrate this issue.

- The interim facility limits proposed will remain in place until VERP is fully implemented. II-31 para 2

- These interim limits would remain in place for up to 5 years or until the National Park Service is confident that the VERP management program is providing sound guidance on appropriate visitor use levels within the river corridor. II-31 para 4



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- Until the VERP management program is fully operational, interim user limits expressed as facility constraints and bus quotas would be put in place to ensure protection of the river's Outstandingly Remarkable Values. II-32 para 1

- These facility limits would be put in place while the VERP program was being refined and implemented, a process which could take up to 5 years. II-33 para 1

- The interim facility limits established in Alternative 2 would remain in place for up to 5 years, until the VERP program is refined and provides robust data on desired conditions. II-37 para 1

What does it mean for VERP to be fully implemented, or fully operational, or refined and implemented, or robust? Won't VERP be implemented indefinitely? This should be clarified.

Comment #5. The DEIS claims there are 2,097 day use parking spaces in Yosemite Valley. The NPS should provide maps of all parking places considered in this total in the Draft SEIS.

Based on personal observation, many NPS-sanctioned day use parking places have significant adverse impacts on ORVs - affecting both natural resources and visitor experience. An example is the area where cars are parked on busy weekends on top of the bike path between the Sentinel Bridge shuttle bus stop and the 3-way stop sign at Sentinel Drive and Northside Drive intersection. Details should be provided, even in this "interim" period, on what constitutes a sound parking space.

Comment #6 How did the NPS select the appropriate "interim limits" for commercial buses?

The current number of bus parking spaces in Yosemite Valley (38) is used to manage 92 commercial or transit buses per day. Data from commercial bus use from August 1996, and transit bus use from August 2000 were used to determine the maximum allowable. Why were these months selected?

Comment #7. Appendix D (User Capacity Alternative Assumptions) must be made more accessible to the reader.

The information in Appendix D is critical to an understanding of the proposed alternatives. The Appendix should be expanded and brought forward into the text of the SEIS. Tables D-1, D-2, D-4, and D-5 should all be in the same format, and should be set up alongside one another for easy comparison.

Table D-1 presents Estimated Daily Visitor Capacity information. Footnote f in this table is confusing. Is this truly the AVERAGE occupancy of lodging and campsites or the MAXIMUM POSSIBLE? I suspect the latter. The text that is footnoted should not exceed the size of the table. Suggest putting important footnoted information in separate tables to increase readability.

Table D-2 footnote d should be clarified. What happens during this 18 month transition period? Will the stated maximum number of lodging units (1,262) and therefore the stated maximum number of overnight visitors is (4,213) be exceeded as a result of this "transition" period? These stated maximum levels should never be exceeded.

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pg 4 of 6

Comment #8                      Table II-7, page II-36 lists Current Capacity Levels for Yosemite Valley with a segment total of 20,569.

What is the source of this number? How was it derived? This information is not contained in Appendix D as stated.

Comment #9                      It makes no sense to increase the number of campsites during the "interim period," or to set the maximum annual cap at 5.3 million visitors (as was proposed in Alts. 3 and 4), which is much larger than the park has ever experienced.

Any development in Yosemite Valley that increases the number of overnight or day visitors above current levels should be put on hold until the VERP process is fully operational and the NPS knows that the levels of use they are prescribing are not going to result in unacceptable impacts to ORVs.

Any increase over present levels of use undermines the credibility of the entire VERP program. Suppose that five years from now the VERP program revealed that present levels of use violated VERP standards and threatened the integrity of ORVs. Would the NPS then remove the new facilities or campsites that are already in place? How can we assume that ORVs will not be harmed by an increase in camping before we have any data to support such a claim?

Comment #10                      I do not believe the user capacity program (VERP) presented in the Draft SEIS will ensure the protection and enhancement of the river's Outstandingly Remarkable Values.

Chapter 1, page 8 of the Draft Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS states "This plan revision will amend the existing Merced River Plan (and General Management Plan) by defining a user capacity program for the Merced River corridor that will be implemented to ensure the protection and enhancement of the river's Outstandingly Remarkable Values." The foundation of the user capacity program proposed in the Draft SEIS is a Visitor Experience and Resource Protection VERP program. The proposed VERP program will not ensure the protection and enhancement of the river's Outstandingly Remarkable Values. Some of the inadequacies of the proposed program are illustrated below.

- The Number of Social Trails indicator does not (as the Draft SEIS states) reflect the health of sensitive vegetation. It reflects only the extent (area) of trampled or pulverized vegetation (that may or may not be native vegetation), or bare soil within a small area. Further, the standard for this indicator is based on a subjective determination that the number and length of such trails as they existed in 2004 was acceptable. Why is 2004 used as the baseline for social trails? By what standards was the number and length of social trails existing in 2004 deemed "acceptable?" Perhaps there already were too many trails that were too long in 2004. Why is this indicator not consistent across zones? For some it is number of social trails, for others it is length of social trails. More work should be done to establish the number and length of trails that truly is acceptable, and this should be based on both resource values and aesthetics.

- The Wildlife Exposures to Human Food indicator does not reflect health of wildlife resources (as the Draft SEIS states), it only reflects numbers of a relatively small number of species that are exposed to, or eat human food. This is a good and important thing to measure, but it is misleading to state that it will reflect the health of wildlife resources. A range of

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pg 5 of 6

wildlife species, such as aquatic invertebrates, should be monitored directly.

- The standards for Riverbank Erosion are based on a 2005 baseline. This assumes that the situation that existed in 2005 was acceptable and adequate to protect ORVs. Are there any data to support this assumption? The standards for this indicator should be subject to peer review by both governmental and non-governmental experts. Standards developed to protect natural resources in Merced River ORVs in perpetuity must be grounded in science. If scientific data are not available for establishment of standards, studies to acquire such data must be pursued, and no increase in visitation should occur until the data indicate such an action would not harm ORVs.

How will the condition classes be determined? How will ecological impacts of riverbank erosion be quantified to ensure resources are protected? This is an example of where I feel technical peer-review is required.

Has the detailed methodology been developed for long-term monitoring of erosion sites? If so, this information should be available to review?

- The standards for Water Quality are self-contradictory and confusing. What does anti-degradation mean? It is assumed to mean no degradation from present conditions, but later the standard says there is an "absolute minimum" related to state fecal coliform levels. Which is it? No degradation or the absolute minimum? Please clarify water quality standards and develop a peer-reviewed monitoring plan.

How will the baseline conditions be determined? When and where will water quality be measured to establish the baseline? Conditions will be very different if measured at Swinging Bridge in January, or May, or better yet, August, when the water can become stagnant. Perhaps it would be best to develop a standard based on upstream water quality (above Little Yosemite Valley). It is important to note that the "safe" levels of fecal coliform relate to human health, and will not necessarily protect other organisms (e.g., aquatic invertebrates). How does the NPS propose to ensure long-term viability of aquatic organisms?

Comment #11. The proposed indicators and standards are too limited to adequately protect Merced River ORVs. There are no proposed indicators and standards related to vegetation loss and alteration, wildlife health, air quality, etc.

The NPS must include indicators for vegetation and wildlife health. How do we know visitation is not adversely affecting birds, aquatic invertebrate, and native vegetation, or increasing nonnative species density or distribution? How do we know visitation is not adversely affecting air quality, natural soundscapes, dark night skies?

Comment #12. To protect Merced Wild and Scenic River ORVs, the NPS should consider taking the following steps:

1. initially adopt the existing GMP visitation numbers;
2. adjust those GMP numbers downward to conform with existing overnight facilities and legitimate, paved parking spaces - these numbers would constitute the interim limits;
3. establish a peer-reviewed set of desired future conditions for both resources and visitor experiences within the river corridor (independent of

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Pg 6 of 6

existing MRP zoning); and

4. develop a scientifically credible set of indicators and standards to determine if numbers of people and patterns of use are continuing to degrade resources and visitor experiences, or are allowing conditions to improve toward the desired set of conditions established in #3 above. The NPS's objective should be an overall improvement of conditions in the Merced River corridor, not maintaining the status quo or allowing further degradation to occur.

Comment #13. I believe if the number of visitors in Yosemite Valley is not limited, and the proposed VERP program is pursued, the result will be further ecological deterioration of Yosemite Valley and ongoing degradation of the quality of the visitor experience.

Comment #14. I suggest the numbers of people allowed in Yosemite Valley and other areas of the river corridor be based on the number of people the NPS can effectively manage.

At present, in the busy season, NPS employees are unable to control speeders, keep litter picked up, keep bathrooms clean, or make frequent informal contacts with visitors.

Comment #15. Any surveys conducted to develop standards for quality of visitor experience must include people who do not come to Yosemite Valley.

This must be done in order to factor in those people who are already displaced (AT ANY SEASON) because of actual or perceived crowding. Thus, if people don't come in summer but come at some other time, then summer is too crowded.

Comment #16. I think it is a mistake to assume that the NPS should encourage more visitation in the "shoulder seasons" of spring, fall and winter because that only creates a greater cumulative impact on resources. The crowding problem may be reduced when compared to summer, but the resources suffer even more.

Once again, I thank you for the opportunity to provide comments to the Draft SEIS for the Merced River.

Sincerely,

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To: yose\_planning@nps.gov  
cc:  
Subject: Draft Revised Merced River Plan

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MAR 22 2005

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

Yosemite and the Merced River are truly one of the wonders of the world. I have spend 30 years enjoying Yosemite. Our first trip was in 1967, we drove from Chicago to see the west and Yosemite was our first stop. Looking back at the photo's the Merced River seems to be a main character. In 1996 I was artist in residence and spend hours sitting by the river painting. My concern is the river is it going to be protected under the Wild and Scenic designation, or will development replace nature.

y

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## American Indian Council of Mariposa County

P.O. BOX 1200 · MARIPOSA, CALIFORNIA 95336

*RMR-D-84/82*  
**Chairman**  
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 Vacant  
**Secretary**  
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 Jeremy Briscoe

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MAR 22 2005

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

March 21, 2005

To: Michael Tollefson, Superintendent

From: Anthony C Brochini, Chairman AICMC

Subject: Comments for the Draft Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS

The Tribes comments on the Revised Merced River Plan will still need to address the issue of visitors the Park will have if there is not a capacity or limit put in place. It just seem that more and more visitors come to the Park every year, which impacts everything, where will it stop!

Alternative 2 is the preferred Plan but is still lacking the Annual Visitation Cap in a 24 hour period which ultimately effects the ecology in the Valley, El Portal and the River Gorges (Merced and South Fork Drainages).

The Tribe is concerned about the lack of information to identify the Cultural Resources of ORV's in Yosemite, El Portal, Wawona and the two major drainages (Merced and South Fork). The traditional use study that is currently underway has not been going smoothly and the Tribal members are hesitant to divulge information to a person that has not been accepted by the Tribe. This study needs to be redirected to something else that will assist the Tribe like Restoration of gathering area that are disappearing or producing low yield of materials due to ecological changes Park wide.

The Tribe would like the Park Service to consider the possibility of modifying the boundary and Zoning of the preferred alternative if Cultural resources and archeological sites are more susceptible to disturbance. Because of past construction of housing and infrastructure, archeological sites and cultural resources were impacted by these projects. El Portal is considered to have the most and oldest archeological sites in the River gorges.

Sincerely,

Anthony C. Brochini  
Chairman of AICMC

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Emerald Hills CA 94062

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MAR 22 2005

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

TO: Superintendent, Yosemite National Park  
 RE: Draft Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS  
 2 pages to Fax #: 209.379.1294

Thank you for reading our Merced River Plan comments. We're humbled, feel a great responsibility, and wish we had time to more carefully study details so we could be more specific. As it stands, our comments take the form of encouragements in the directions we would like to see our National Park Service take in caring for a place we love.

We've probably averaged at least one or two trips a year to Yosemite over more than 25 years. The approach up the Merced River Canyon is one of the most beautiful and memorable drives we know of. We credit Yosemite with awakening our love of Nature decades ago, and count many First-at-Yosemite, and Only-at-Yosemite, experiences. At the risk of sounding Muir-esque—we even experienced a taste of rapture. To this day we remain deeply moved and grateful for Yosemite's existence—whether or not we're there. We're also unreasonably proud that Yosemite—one of our Nation's "Crown Jewels" and an international attraction—happens to be in our home state.

As attached as we are, this issue is not about us—nor *any* of us here now. Yosemite comes to us from the ages and deserves to be handed down through the ages—healthy and intact—so that future generations can also be stunned and awed and experience rapture. That constituency isn't here yet and can't comment, but we encourage you to always keep them in mind. What will they think of the decisions we make now?

#### **Prioritize Resource Protection**

- With all due respect, VERP has it backwards. Resource Protection has to come first. If resources deteriorate, then attempting to monitor Visitor Experience becomes increasingly silly. When resources (the independent variable) dwindle to mere shadows of their former selves, visitor experience (a dependent variable) necessarily follows.
- In keeping an eye on the Merced River and the surrounding Valley, we should employ the best ecological (biological, hydrological, geological, etc) science and scientists available, and update their standards and approach as necessary. Visitor and parking surveys might work as proxy indicators, but first we'd have to calibrate them to actual river health. If the goal is to preserve a wild and scenic river, it makes more sense to survey organisms and ecosystems. Later, perhaps, car counts might correlate with biological impact.

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Pg 282

- Be proactive about protection and restoration. If we wait for conditions to get bad enough to register, we may wait too long. Besides, meadows are *already* trampled. Beaches and river banks are *already* heavily impacted. In other words, we've already passed "baseline" for ecosystem health. We should think in terms of *restoring* vitality, not preserving an unhealthy status quo. Perhaps, when scientists can get a better handle on what the River and its denizens can handle, then maybe we can ease protections.
- Be proactive about education as well. Interpretive Rangers already work hard, but they are too few and need more support. (Yes, the current Administration has pinched NPS—and we're mad about that—but we're all holding up our best visions here, aren't we?) Anyone so blessed as to visit the Valley—and certainly anyone living there (various employees)—should be apprised of the proper way to treat this International Treasure. People usually don't mean to cause damage, and often don't even know that they are. The combination of love and knowledge is powerful. Visitors bring love, which the NPS can nurture and guide with knowledge.
- *Don't increase the visitor cap!* Yosemite is being loved to death *already*, at about 4 million visitors a year. The River and its surrounds are *already* suffering from too much humanity. Visitation has apparently fallen off in recent years. Let's count Yosemite's blessings! (With more education (the prior point) more people might know how to behave, and the Park might be able to support more visitors.)

### Set an Example

Yosemite must be one of the more complex and difficult to manage parks in our NPS system. And as one of the Crown Jewels, it's high profile as well. All the more reason for the NPS to set an exemplary standard here. There can be no excuse for cutting corners (or diminishing the El Portal Boundary) below what other agencies and jurisdictions enforce along wild and scenic rivers. The NPS is entrusted with our nation's superlative places. The Merced River and Yosemite are superlative among the superlatives—the cream of the cream—what a blessed burden! What an exceptional opportunity to do what's right.

### Remember the Future

Always keep in mind that voiceless constituency that will wish we had been smarter, or at least made better use of the knowledge we have. How long will it take Nature to fix our mistakes, assuming she ever can? The longer it would take to recover from a certain course of action, the longer we should consider that action.

We're trusting our National Park Service to take the best possible care of this precious place. It's not about us—any of us. It's not about now. Please manage for future generations—human and otherwise. We can enjoy this gem now while still leaving them as many options as possible.

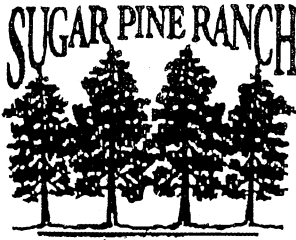
Respectfully,

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pg 182 RECEIVED

MAR 22 2005

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

21250 Highway 120 -- Groveland, CA 95321 -- (209) 962-7823 -- Email: [maxwell@goldrush.com](mailto:maxwell@goldrush.com)

March 21, 2005

Michael J. Tollefson, Superintendent  
Yosemite National Park  
P.O. Box 577  
Yosemite, CA 95389  
Draft Revised Merced River Plan / EIS

Dear Superintendent Tollefson,

RE: Revised Merced River Plan / Environmental Impact Statement (RMRP).

Unfortunately, we do not see recognition by the National Park Service (NPS) of the issues we have raised in prior public hearings or within our correspondence on this matter. It appears to us that NPS is not hearing, caring about, or considering these issues:

1. **Personal Vehicles and Campgrounds** – our opinion is that the plan unfairly, and inappropriately favors Valley commercial interests and other gateway corridors. The NPS sites demographics and economics by county, knowing full well that our south Tuolumne County State Highway 120 corridor is a separate and significantly different micro commerce from that of the county as a whole.
  - a. **Bus Traffic** – the bus-to-car parking ratio favors other corridors. Our corridor cannot accommodate much if any bus traffic – pass through or overnight. In fact, the larger buses cannot legally travel up our Priest grade and therefore through town. Parking for cars is inadequate as a percentage of total transported visitors per parking space type.
  - b. **Private Vehicles** – due to the corridor's whitewater river rafting and camping focus, most travelers through our corridor are in cars and looking for overnight camping and day-use parking for hikes and site visits. Additionally, during the high season, a majority of travelers are driving cars and campers/RVs touring the western USA in a fashion not supported by bus-based systems. More private vehicle parking and traffic management accommodations are needed.
2. **Visitor Experience/Capacity Management** – issues of capacity management are only addressed in the theoretical sense – long-term measures of ORVs for the recommended Alternative 2. Statements like "Day visitor use of the Valley would be limited by managing to existing parking levels in the east and west Valley..." and "The adoption of the interim parking limit for Yosemite Valley would likely result in the need to implement restricted access policies several times each year..." and "...park management may temporarily restrict vehicles from entering Yosemite Valley when traffic congestion reaches predetermined levels." etc. fail to address the capacity management issues. These statements in fact amplify our concerns for having a comprehensive capacity management plan. Without specific guidelines and procedures the visitor experience is sure to be negatively impacted, and so is the gateway economy. If Valley restrictions are imposed will travel over Tioga Pass as well as to and from Tuolumne Meadows be possible? How about coordination and communications between the Park and gateway community to ameliorate potential congestion? Or better yet, what action will the Park take to improve traffic flow and provide overload or buffer parking. Bottom line, there is no plan in the plan that adequately addresses capacity management and visitor experience from a gateway commerce point of view.

**RMRP Comments**

3/21/2005

Page 2 of 2

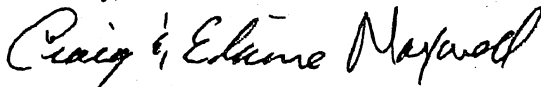
RMR-D-86  
pg 2 of 2

We in Groveland and Big Oak Flat have worked hard (over the past year or so) to build bridges between the NPS and our communities. It has been our hope and understanding that a collaborative and an open dialogue would result in improved and beneficial consideration for both the NPS and our community. We believe the NPS and a large number of our community's leaders appreciate the importance of mutual cooperation. Without this cooperation, how will balance between natural resource use and commerce be achieved? The RMRP does not reflect this – in our opinion. Perhaps, we simply do not see the needed campgrounds, adequate private vehicle parking, or balance with our economic situation. The plan does NOT achieve the issue and concern it claims to address, "How the user capacity program would be implemented and potential impacts to gateway communities."

The RMRP is overly complicated and is very difficult to read. It is an incomprehensible document by most accredited standards (sentences with upwards of 50 words.) It is filled with a highly redundant montage of details, which is totally unnecessary, and we can only assume meant to ignore important issues, and force the reader to give up commenting.

Based on all this, we recommend the NPS withdraw from Public comment the RMRP; begin anew with a cooperative effort with your gateway partners as our gateway partner workshops have lead us to believe is the right process; rework the plan to better meet gateway needs, and make the plan more understandable and consistent with the NPS mission.

Sincerely,



Craig and Elaine Maxwell  
Sugar Pine Ranch  
Groveland, CA



Peggy Mosley  
Groveland Hotel  
Groveland, CA

cc: Highway 120 Chamber of Commerce  
Tuolumne County Visitor's Bureau

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MAR 22 2005

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

To whom it may concern -

May we please have  
an extension on  
comment period.

The plan is very confusing  
and I would like more time  
to study it with more  
information.

Thank you for your  
consideration

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Pg 1 of 4  
MAR 22 2005  
YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

Sir,

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Regarding the Draft Merced Wild  
and Scenic River Revised Comprehensive  
Management Plan + Supplemental  
Environmental Impact Statement  
(Draft Revised Merced River  
Plan / SEIS.), I support  
alternative 4 with its quant-  
itative management approach.  
I also believe the Visitor  
Experience and Resource  
Protection (V.E.R.P.) should be

5 yr. analysis should <sup>RMR-D-87</sup> <sup>pg 12 of 4</sup> be  
applied to this alternative.

V.E.R.P. seem illusive or  
otherwise undetermined at this  
time.

My expectations of a Visitor  
Experienced and, expectation in this  
process, relating to the Yosemite  
Valley Corridor specifically, is a  
sense of solitude represented by  
seeing and passing 25 people <sup>or less</sup> on  
the trail I'm on. I expect much

RMR-D-87 (3)  
fewer undeveloped trails "face"  
304

working" the meadows. I  
would expect fewer than 20 people  
on a 40' x 100' beach.

Further in my Visitor Expectations  
I would hope to see more indigenous  
animals of the Valley, like reptiles  
and Grizzly Bear. I see few  
snakes in general and believe  
many species are 'extinct' from  
Yosemite Valley because of the trampling  
of ground over time by the multitudes

of Visitors. I feel the Redneck,<sup>KLMR-D-87  
pg 488</sup>  
Gopher and Rattle Snakes are  
non-existent or reduced to an  
un-viable number in Yosemite  
Valley and are a Resource Experience  
that needs Protection with a  
~~Carrying~~ Carrying Capacity.

I feel the 5 yr. V.E.R.P.  
analysis should be included with  
Alternatives 2, 3 + 4.

Thanks

PS <sup>Mr.</sup> Mariposa, Ca 95338  
include this letter in the Public Record.

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March 17, 2005


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MAR 22 2005  
YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

Michael Tollefson, Superintendent  
Yosemite National Park  
PO Box 577  
Yosemite, CA 95389

Re: Draft Revised Merced River Plan/EIS

Dear Superintendent Tollefson:

It is with great disappointment that the recent Revised Merced River Plan/EIS (RMRP) again creates the impression that Yosemite National Park is not accessible. Information conveyed by the National Park Service can greatly influence public perception, as we have experienced in the past. Point in case, the opposition to some alternative actions such as Day Use Reservations, quotas and possible gate closures was dismissed as management actions *unlikely to be used*. Why include them? The perception is negative.

Respectfully, 

Managing Partner  
Oakhurst Lodge



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MAR 22 2005

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK



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03/22/2005 09:48 AM  
PST

To: yose\_planning@nps.gov  
cc:  
Subject: D. R. MRP

To Whom It May Concern,

I would just like to express my concern for what is happening with the valley in general, and specifically for the plans along the Merced River. Granted, human population is increasing, thus leading to inevitable development. However, the key issue is HOW this development takes place.

I am not an environmental scientist or a professional planner, but from my years of experience in building, I do know that it is not always necessary to build MORE, but rather build SMARTER. By this I mean, rather than dozing for more sites for structures and pavement, affecting the vitality and beauty of the valley, why not remodel the existing infrastructure? Why not put that money into clean public transportation and limit vehicular traffic to through traffic and RV's only?

We have been given a tremendous responsibility as caretakers of this land. It is time to fulfill that responsibility and take measures to insure the preservation of this land, not only for future generations, but out of respect for the life of the land itself.

I greatly appreciate all of your hard work, and thank you for your time and consideration of my words.

Sincerely,

Sonora, CA

le!

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03/22/2005 10:22 AM  
PST

To: yose\_planning@nps.gov  
cc:  
Subject: draft comment

RMR-D-91  
pg 1 of 6  
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MAR 22 2005

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

Public Comment  
Draft Merced Wild and Scenic River  
Revised Comprehensive Management Plan/SEIS

March 21, 2005

Superintendent Yosemite National Park  
P.O. Box 577  
Yosemite, CA 95389

The following is a revision to my oral and written statement submitted in

Sacramento on March 1, 2005. As before my comments will focus on issues

related to user capacity in Yosemite Valley.

After many hours of study and review I have found the Draft Revised

Merced River Plan/SEIS extremely difficult to comprehend. Pertinent data

comparing the alternatives are inconsistent, scattered in tables, footnotes and

appendices and are almost impossible to decipher. Unfortunately, at this point

in the process I am not sure what can or should be done, but it seems to me this

document fails to meet the requirements for a meaningful public review. The

average citizen concerned with the future of Yosemite simply should not be

expected to deal with such an utterly confusing statement.

In addition to problems with interpretation there is far too little discussion in

the document on how to accomplish the complexities of regulating use

once limits are determined whatever they are. An interim limit of 18,241

persons at one time as suggested in the GMP for Yosemite Valley may be a

reasonable starting point. What if day and overnight use demand exceeds this

number? What if environmental data indicates 18,241 is already too high?

Limiting use by segment and zone as suggested in alternatives III and IV and

would likely be required under preferred alternative II as well, would be an

administrative nightmare for the NPS requiring large but unknown numbers of

enforcement personnel and infrastructure developments. A resource oriented

interpretive staff would be substituted with one run by a police force herding

unlimited numbers of Valley visitors to least desirable venues. The visitor

experience would be seriously compromised by these alternatives and the

impacts of overuse would simply expand to other Valley areas. Such a

result is completely unacceptable.

A far more reasonable solution to the user capacity issue would be to

implement a day use reservation system for vehicles incorporating a first come

first serve component, for a limited number without a reservation. Initially the

system would be used only during peak use periods when vehicle numbers are

expected to exceed capacity. The implementation of a day use vehicle

reservation system should include gateway community involvement

and a public awareness and education program describing the need and a

system that would guarantee day use entry once a

reservation system is in

place. Emphasis must be made that a day use reservation system is not

designed to limit access it is designed to guarantee access! There are

references in the document to increased visitation that would require

implementation of restricted vehicle access to Yosemite Valley during peak

visitation periods, but there is no discussion as to how that restricted access

would be accomplished. A day use reservation system is not only long overdue

it is ultimately the only solution to the recreational demands of exploding

population growth in near-by central valley and foothill communities. Without a

reasonably administered day use system there will be an inexorable and

unavoidable return to horrific visitation levels experienced in Yosemite Valley

during peak periods in the early 1960's when daily visitation levels in Yosemite

stood at nearly 70,000 with a high percentage of the visitation in East Valley

destinations. The resulting chaos extant during that period will surly return if a

reservation system is not implemented. The system will protect Park resources

and insure a quality visitor experience in Yosemite Valley and will help to satisfy

the Ninth Circuit Court's directives. Far more emphasis should be given to this

issue in any supplements, summaries or revisions to this draft plan. Failure to

address a day use reservation system in a comprehensive manner is a serious

oversight in this document.

Further, there appears to be no significant discussion of the multi-million

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pg 4 of 6

dollar construction projects at the Lodge and Curry that were halted by the Ninth

Circuit Court directives. References to the projects included under reasonably

foreseeable future actions seems to imply the projects will proceed as soon as

the final document is completed, well ahead of the 5-year resource assessment

period. If constructed, will new and upgraded lodging units and road projects be

torn down and removed if after 5 years, resource assessment indicators

determine use levels are too high? Such an action would seem highly unlikely.

Why is there no discussion of the need to hold up on the highly

controversial north side drive (NSD) and section D road alignments until a full

evaluation of their impacts are made during this five-year resource assessment

period? It is imperative that a full re-evaluation of the NSD realignment proposal

at Yosemite Lodge be made, as this highly controversial issue is crucial in

implementing any VERP process. When a quality visitor experience conflicts

with a significant resource protection issue there should be only one outcome,

resource protection wins. This is clearly not the case with the planned

realignment of the NSD. The NSD realignment could be terminated without

interfering with other components of the Lodge Redevelopment Project that

otherwise might move forward if this highly controversial element is removed.

The development of an EIS for section D later in 2005 may satisfy a legal

requirement for proceeding with a project that will

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pg 5086

allow easier access to ever

more and larger vehicles to Yosemite Valley. I thought this process was to

promote ideas and projects that would reduce the number and size of vehicles

and their impacts on Valley resources. It is difficult to see how proceeding with

the section D alignment accomplishes that.

One of the most significant benefits of the Ninth Circuit Court decision was

that it held up these enormous construction projects until a full review of their

impacts and need are completed. At the very least the draft document should

present a rationale for why they appear to be going forward on an essentially

irreversible course prior to the completion of the 5-year resource assessment

period.

Unless substantial changes are made in the draft revision it appears to

me that everything is on schedule and as soon as the final document and ROD is

signed later this year construction will resume. After 5 years of study, the

visitation issue dating back to at least 1980, will remain unresolved, and the

newly acquired resource assessment data will have to meld into a new

infrastructure already in place.

The NSD and section D road alignments are by far the most damaging

components of the proposed projects. At the very least if there is going to be any

meaningful outcome in this effort to protect the Merced River's ORV'S, NSD and

section D must be put on hold until further public review and a full disclosure of

RMR-D-91  
pg 6 of 6

their environmental impacts are determined.

Thanks for listening.

El Dorado Hills, CA 95762

March 22, 2005  
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MAR 22 2005

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

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Superintendent  
Yosemite National Park  
P.O. Box 577  
Yosemite National Park, California 95389

Subject: Draft Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS

The National Park Service (NPS) has begun revised scooping activities regarding a comprehensive Yosemite Valley Plan, which will borrow heavily from several previous plans, including the Draft Yosemite Housing Plan, and Draft Yosemite Valley Implementation Plan.

The Yosemite Valley Railroad (YVRR) is dedicated to reestablishing rail as an alternative public transportation link to Yosemite National Park. In prior correspondence to NPS, we took issue with the quality of transportation elements in both the Housing and Valley Implementation Plans. Specifically, we found that none of the plans adequately dealt with the full range of regional transportation alternatives available, and, perhaps more importantly, failed to preserve the ability to provide other transportation alternatives at a future date.

We are expressing this opinion and providing this information in the hope that you and other leaders within the Park Service Planning group take serious consideration of a future rail system in your scooping process. The added benefit of this rail system would enhance the transportation structure for the New UC Merced Campus. As the map would indicate it would be a direct connection to the Campus on La Paloma Rd. to the Amtrak system and the proposed High Speed Rail, to include future Airport facilities at the Former Castle Air Base.

Technical Memorandum #3, of the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation Strategy (YARTS) included the following summary:

"The rail alternative supports most of YARTS criteria except for two key criteria. The most important issue for the rail mode is timeliness for implementation. ... Additionally, the rail alternative would likely be developed in only one corridor, ... However, there is a long-term potential for rail transportation to Yosemite ... ." [YARTS Technical Memorandum #3, May 15, 1997, page 19.]

Consultant transportation experts came to the same conclusion at the 1996 Yosemite Park Transportation Symposium. Their recommendations included references to the historic precedence of the YVRR, which operated in the Merced River corridor up to El Portal from 1906 to 1945. We strongly encourage that whatever plan you might consider, it would include a feasibility study for future rails.

Transportation plans are required to be comprehensive. The initial NPS efforts and YARTS studies were comprehensive, but the resultant plans are not. This approach seems to be the antithesis of transportation planning practiced elsewhere in the United States, where diversity in



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pg 2 of 2

modes and methods is typically embraced. Yosemite is the 'Crown Jewel' of America's national park system. We live in the most technologically advanced country in the world founded on the entrepreneurial spirit. We are on the threshold of a new millennium. And, the best alternative we have to the automobile for the next 20 plus years is a regional public bus system? While we support a regional bus system proposal as part of the solution, by itself, it is a bland, status quo response that lacks imagination and fails to add the journey as part of the Yosemite adventure.

Now that the National Park Service will recommence a revised plan for the valley and region, we think it's important the rail alternative be recognized in the NPS plan. We are not suggesting they study the alternative in exhausting detail at this time, but we do believe that the option needs to be recognized because decisions will be made over the next several years that may preclude forever the ability to develop such an alternative.

The ultimate decision to build rail transportation to Yosemite will be competitive and will necessitate the combined efforts of private and public organizations including local, regional, state, and federal organizations. Not an easy task. The Yosemite Valley Railroad, a nonprofit (501)(c)(3) group encourages support from the NPS to do a feasibility report on such a rail system to better serve the public. Not only for passenger service but for freight possibilities and waste hauled out of the Park to a remote location.

In closing, we applaud and support the Park Service for the steps it is taking to achieve GMP goals by proposing to implement a very progressive plan for the Park. We know that there are a broad range of perspectives to address, which complicates the planning and slows implementation of changes. However, with specific reference to the transportation elements of the plan, we cannot support any of the alternatives proposed. The level of detail necessary to fully understand the transportation elements of the plan, the plan's failure to reflect the diversity available in transportation services, lack of a long-range perspective, and failure to relate to other Park transportation needs, sets the tone for our recommendation that the National Park Service planners expand the range of alternatives as it relates to transportation.

Sincerely,

Ted Hogan, President  
Yosemite Valley Railroad Co.

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pg 218-4



To: <yose planning@nps.gov>

nk.net>

Subject: Comments on Draft Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS ...

03/22/2005 12:00 PM  
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MAR 22 2005

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

Superintendent, Yosemite National Park  
Draft Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS  
P.O. Box 577  
Yosemite, CA 95389

March 22nd, 2005

Dear Superintendent:

I have been trying to read and understand the Draft Revised Merced River Plan/SEIS that has been released for comment. Clearly a lot of work has gone into its preparation, but I must say that I find it fairly confusing and not really addressing some key issues that I understand it was to address. It appears, among other things, to lack any quantitative substance with regard to addressing capacity issues.

I am greatly disappointed that this draft plan is not protective of the Merced River's special values. This plan should have been, and is required to be, formed around protection of those values. But instead this current draft of the plan continues to be a justification for already determined Yosemite Valley Plan (YVP) plans and projects. Most of those plans and projects will end up constructing new buildings, and bulldozing for more pavement and further commercializing Yosemite -- degrading the River's values, and my enjoyment of this special River.

I have been coming to this park with my family since the early 1950's and spent many happy hours near the Merced. We have stayed in the old Lodge cabins, camped in river campgrounds and at Curry Houskeeping, stayed in tent cabins and even in backpackers campgrounds. I love Yosemite and the Merced as if it was my second home and it has caused me much concern and grief to see the amount of urbanization and development upscaling that has been creeping into park planning over the years. The goal of park planning should be to protect and preserve. Unfortunately, the planning process appears to be leaning more toward making Yosemite like a city park than a protected wildlife preserve.

As I understand it, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA) sets aside certain rivers in the USA in order to be truly protected. The values for which a river receives this designation, are called the Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs).

When I try to figure out how this plan is based on protection of the ORVs, I find that it is not. I should be able to walk along the River's 1/4 mile wide Wild and Scenic River Boundary (along each side of the River) with the river plan in hand, and understand what the ORVs are, where the ORVs are located, what the larger ecosystem is that they are dependent upon (that thus needs to be protected); when they can be enjoyed or watched for; whether they are a threatened, endangered, or rare park species; whether they are being protected by understandable

and measurable indicators and standards; how the Park Service is monitoring them to make sure they are not being degraded; what actions the Park Service is going to take to protect them; and how I can help in that protection and monitoring.

Yosemite is one of the most visually stunning locations in the world, the Merced River is one of the most treasured Rivers. Yet this plan appears to reflect that the Park Service does not understand the special values and the special experience to be had.

This River Plan serves the dictates of the predetermined Yosemite Valley Plan. The Management Zones continue to justify the build out plans, and more, of the YVP. On top of that, the Park Service continues to show a chart that purports to show the Yosemite Valley Plan is based on the River Plan. A valid finalized River Plan does not yet even exist, so it is obvious to anyone that the Yosemite Valley Plan is predetermining the zoning in the River Plan. Protection of the River's special values should be determining the River Plan; then and only then, should a plan, such as the YVP be put together. YVP projects should have been and should be based on whether or not they degrade River values. If they do degrade the River, then they should not take place.

The Yosemite Valley Plan supports a marketing plan to transport hundreds of thousands of additional short term tourists enticed into Yosemite to spend money at concessions by both Park Service and Concessionaire marketing campaigns. This would entail more pavement in Yosemite Valley and elsewhere in the Park. Almost all of these plans will degrade the Merced River's values and degrade and interfere with the visitor experience of the River's and Park's natural values.

User capacity including the all important types of uses (uses based on the natural and cultural values of Yosemite, versus resort/urban amenities and construction), are integral to a plan that protects the River's values, and cannot merely be slapped onto an already invalid plan -- unfortunately, that is just what NPS appears to be doing in the current release of the D. R. MRP.

In this plan, it talks a whole lot about the negative impacts of "visitors" on "park resources"; while the unfortunate reality is that in recent years, it is the Park Service and its plans and projects which have made the most negative and significant degradation and destruction of the River's ORVs. While the NPS worries about some "trampling" from visitors walking, it appears to be completely ignoring the incomparable and vastly greater impacts from a myriad of projects, such as the bulldozing along the Merced River Gorge. It is also unfortunate and I believe illegal that NPS does not disclose adequately, or oftentimes at all, the significant and cumulative impacts of the National Park Service projects that have already taken place, are taking place, and are planned to take place. The Yosemite Valley Plan is filled with such projects. (See D. R. MRP, Appendix F)

The view of Yosemite Valley as a whole is an ORV. NPS has used the specific viewsheds identified in the 1980 General Management to constrict the Scenic ORVs to those particular views photographed or painted by certain artists. If those artists had spent additional time in Yosemite Valley, they would have photographed and painted additional views -- a whole lifetime would not suffice.

While the Yosemite Valley Scenic ORV lists many magnificent views

"from the river and its banks", THE VALLEY AS A WHOLE (as John Muir observed, "The Valley Comprehensively Seen") is an ORV. In addition, NPS seems to have gotten lost in a bureaucratic haze; a haze that obscures the fact that not only views standing in the Merced River corridor in Yosemite looking UP, but also views from above looking DOWN on the Merced River corridor from the top of the Valley walls (the river, meadows, uplands, Valley walls) are most certainly ORV's in and of their own right. To say that to see these views is a rare opportunity, is to understate that experience.

When listing ORVs, it is important to list all the known ORVs, for example all the species, and precede the listing with the words, "including, but not limited to..." Otherwise the list could become hardened in time and fail to protect species not yet identified or located or that might move into (or be restored such as the red-legged frog) the River corridor. This is critically important. The ORVs are the FOUNDATION AND BASIS of a protective and valid river plan.

In addition, it is important to disclose that ORVs, such as biologic and hydrologic, are not discrete. Many are dependent upon the larger surrounding ecosystem and/or species for their health and existence; and therefore need to be protected and managed as such.

This current draft of the plan is not clear:

It uses terms that it does not define and mixes other terms. If I try to look something up in the Index, it is impossible to find what I am specifically looking for.

It is not possible to compare the various alternatives to each other in a meaningful way.

It is unclear what this D. R. MRP intends to do, except to set in place zoning to accommodate Yosemite Valley Plan development, construction, and further commercialization.

I ask NPS to pull this greatly flawed and inadequate document, prepare a new or completely revised document based on protecting the River's values and my non-commercial experience of them, and then put that document out for a new public comment period.

I ask NPS to immediately halt all park planning and projects within, or dependent upon, the river corridor and/or the ORVs which the court has not specifically allowed to go forward.

If a Comprehensive Management Plan for the Merced River is to mean something in substance, how can there be plans and projects ongoing which will affect the ORVs without a valid, finalized CMP in place? Does a CMP for the Merced River mean anything more than a stack of paper to Yosemite National Park managers and administrators? Please, demonstrate that it does by throwing out the Management Zones which are virtually a planning map for the Yosemite Valley Plan. Then start again on a fresh draft with the ORVs and build a River Plan based on their protection. That is, after all, the purpose for a WSR Management Plan.

Respectfully,